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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000804

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ADDIS ABABA FOR US REP TO AU
PRETORIA FOR EXTERNAL POL AFFAIRS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IV

SUBJECT: SORO, FORCES NOUVELLES STAY TIGHTLIPPED ON AUTHORS
OF ATTACK

REF: A. ABIDJAN 764

- 1B. ABIDJAN 755
- 1C. ABIDJAN 732
- 1D. ABIDJAN 719

Classified By: EconChief EMassinga, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. Emboff traveled to Forces Nouvelles stronghold Bouake to meet with key aides to Prime Minister Soro concerning the investigation into who attacked Soro on June 29 (reftel D, C). Soro aide Cisse Sindou said the PM will not comment on who the authors of the attack were until an international investigation is conducted, and his top lieutenants on the civilian and military side appeared to fall in line behind this directive. Several interlocutors outside of the Soro camp expressed unease that the peace process is stalled, largely due to mistrust between Soro and Gbagbo stemming from the attack, despite the pomp and circumstance surrounding the July 30 "Flame of Peace" ceremony. End Summary.

12. (C) Emboff traveled July 25-26 to Bouake, stronghold of the Forces Nouvelles and de facto seat of Prime Minister Soro since the June 29 attack on his life (reftel C, D), to meet with senior aides to the PM concerning the investigation into who was behind the attempt. Senior Forces Nouvelles ministers and key advisors to the Prime Minister had become increasingly unavailable and unwilling to talk in Abidjan. The preparations for the July 30 "Flame of Peace" ceremony added to the general unavailability of key Soro aides.

The Scene

13. (C) Emboff took a UN Mission in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI) flight. In Abidjan, the presidential Fokker 100 that had transported Soro when he and his entourage were attacked was in plain view, parked in front of the ONUCI hanger. The damage to the plane was easy to see and one large hole with burn marks around it and another, smaller hole without such marks were both covered with plastic sheeting. There was no/no additional damage, either from rocket or from automatic weapon fire visible from the outside.

14. (C) Security at the Bouake airport is heavily reinforced. For Emboff's ONUCI flight, a platoon of armed ONUCI troops held strategic positions around the airfield and in a guard tower overlooking the ONUCI terminal. The brush had been recently pushed at least 100 meters back from the runway, taxiways and terminal by ONUCI equipment still in

place.

Forces Nouvelles Carefully Addresses Rumors, Exhibits Tight
Message Discipline

¶15. (C) Emboff was greeted by Forces Nouvelles Deputy Director of Cabinet Cisse Sindou at the group's civilian HQ. According to Sindou (an 18-year resident of the U.S. whose wife and children still reside in the NYC area), he has been active in the FNs since its inception and has taken on the role of chief interlocutor between the PM's office and the various governmental arms of the redeployment of civil administration and the FNs. Sindou told Emboff that the FNs and Soro were continuing to work diligently to put into place a durable peace process through deployment of administration, despite the unfortunate June 29 attack. Sindou said that neither the FNs nor the PM would dignify rumors concerning the authors of the attack, preferring to see a proper international investigation, whatever the length of time needed.

¶16. (S) Emboff asked about a specific report in the press (which has also been the subject of several sensitive reports) that indicates the Burkina intelligence service had helped determine that elements close to the Presidency had conspired with I.B. Coulibaly to assassinate the PM. Sindou demurred at commentary, saying vaguely that others at a higher level would have to comment. Emboff asked about the 150 Burkinabe troops pledged by President Compaore for ONUCI (Note: top aides to senior ONUCI officials had been dismayed at the potential for such a deployment, fearing the "signal of mistrust it would give." End Note). Upbeat, Sindou said the troop deployment would occur as soon as the Burkina

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legislature ratified the plan.

¶17. (C) Emboff had been scheduled to meet with FNs military Chief of Staff Bakayoko. Pleading extreme scheduling conflicts and the demands to work around the clock with PM Soro and his top aides de camp on the "Flame of Peace" ceremony preparations, Bakayoko said he could not find the time to meet. Zone Commander "Big" called Emboff personally later in the day, apologizing for his superior's unavailability, but promising profusely to meet once the ceremony had passed. (Comment: The interaction of the FNs top leadership with Emboff during the Bouake trip appeared closely choreographed. Both Bakayoko and ComZone Big were well aware of the visit, but the former allowed he would have little to say since the designated spokesman Sindou had already met with Emboff. Emboff called Minister Sidiki Konate (FNs #3) and the PMs spokesman Alain Lobognon, both of whom were in Bouake (along with #2 Dacoury Tabley); both declined to meet, despite being frequent interlocutors in Abidjan before the June 29. End Comment.)

The Mayor of Bouake Weighs In

¶18. (C) The Mayor of Bouake, Fanny Ibrahima, met with Emboff for dinner on July 25. Ibrahima was at the center of a beehive of activity, taking friendly calls from the newly-installed (but not yet resident) prefect and having just come from an evening countdown meeting for the "Flame of Peace" ceremony presided over by Soro and attended by top aides. Clearly unwilling to discuss sensitive topics at Emboff's hotel, he and Emboff met at the Mayor's house for breakfast the following morning. Ibrahima chose not to comment on the rumors mentioned in para 6, but pointedly did not/not contradict them. Offering insights into the Forces Nouvelles' inner workings, Ibrahima was dismissive of Konate, saying he'd embarrassed himself in the immediate aftermath of the June 29 attack, and implying strongly that Sindou has

effectively taken his place. Responding to questions concerning Tabley's near disappearance from the public scene, Ibrahima confirmed the War Victims and Solidarity Minister has been sidelined, partially over his reported unhappiness at Soro's decision to take the Prime Ministership, partially over a personal dispute with Soro involving the affections of a woman in Ouagadougou.

Contacts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ONUCI Express Misgivings

¶9. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Ambassador Tanoh Bouthoue, Director of the Office of International Organizations and UN Affairs, asked to meet with Emboff the evening of his return from Bouake, citing the urgent need to exchange several routine pending demarches. Meeting at Emboff's home, Bouthoue made it clear he strongly suspects the Presidential camp in the Soro attack, specifically hard-liner William Atteby (a close ally of First Lady Simone Gbagbo and who was quoted saying "the attempted assassination pales in comparison to the war crimes of Soro and his confederates"). Bouthoue was plainly worried that a Presidential hand in the attack would deal a fatal blow to the peace process, and sought to enlist the aid of the U.S. in preventing that. (Note: it was unclear if Bouthoue was freelancing or acting under orders from FM Bakayoko. Both Bouthoue and Bakayoko are members of the opposition PDCI. End Note).

¶10. (C) ONUCI's DDR head Jean Luc Stalon called Emboff on the evening of the 26th to express his own disappointment with the pace of the peace process. Speaking frankly, he said the pace of DDR and other key processes had slowed to a crawl, mostly due to mistrust ONUCI sees between the Soro and Gbagbo camps subsequent to the attack on Soro. While still in Bouake, Emboff spoke to ONUCI's Acting Sector East Commander Col. Adams from the Ghana Battalion. Puzzled over the odd combination of amateurishness and cunning in the Soro attack, Col. Adams remarked at the inability of the assailants to hit the aircraft with small arms fire, despite it being no more than 80 meters away as it made a slow, vulnerable turn towards the ONUCI hangar. Adams noted the long-standing discord within the FNs military wing, which had been roiled by the March 4 Ouaga Accord, and pointed to the July 10 attack on ComZone Zakaria's Bouake residence as

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evidence such tensions persist. Turning to the alternate theory of President's camp involvement in the attack, Adams said that "informed opinion" in Bouake before the attack had either Gbagbo or Soro moving to eliminate the other within short order, so the June 29 attack came as no surprise.

¶11. (C) Comment. The organization of both the Forces Nouvelles' engagement with Emboff and Soro's equally tight control over all of his lieutenants during the preparation for the "Flame of Peace" ceremony tends to indicate they are very cautious with their public and even private messages related to the ultra-sensitive topic of who tried to kill their leader. That same organization, in addition to the fact Soro has remained in Bouake for essentially the past month, tends to undercut the theory that the attack was an inside job, although Soro could merely be attempting to keep his enemies where he can see them. No one in his circle has pointed a public or private finger in the direction of the President. However, they seem to be taking prudent steps, such as bringing in a company of Compaore's paratroopers (though this is not yet a certainty), while at the same time pushing forward with the element of the peace process they care most deeply about, identification (the arms destruction in the "Flame of Peace" was symbolic, according to Soro's team, and does not signify a renewed focus or even a new breakthrough on the thorny questions hindering DDR progress).

Going forward, it remains to be seen if the suspicions within the Soro camp that the Presidency had a role to play in the June 29 plot will poison the atmosphere to the point that the peace process will grind to a halt. End Comment.

HOOKS